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SUBJECT: ANTI-CORRUPTION CRUSADER DETAINED IN VLADIVOSTOK

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¶1. Authorities have arrested long-time consulate contact Colonel Aleksandr Astafyev, the Director of Witness Protection Center and deputy head of the Primorye UVD. He was arrested in his office on June 16 on fraud charges, and is currently in pre-trial detention. Astafyev is a close POL/ECON contact and participated in a State Department sponsored International Visitors Program devoted to fighting corruption. He is a well known speaker at seminars organized by the Far Eastern National University's Organized Crime Study Center (OCSC) and had received a grant from the OCSC to write about violent corporate takeovers in Primorye.

Detained on Fraud Charges  
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¶2. Poloff and FSN discussed the case with OCSC Director Vitaliy Nomokonov, who is sure the criminal case against Astafyev is a result of his research pointing to high-level officials, specifically regarding the hostile takeover of Vladivostok's OGAT Transport Company and the murder of its director. He explained that the spurious fraud charges are based on the purchase by a sponsor of a sofa, an air conditioner and a computer for use in his office. Though all these items were registered officially in the UVD inventory list, authorities assert that they were unauthorized.

Fearing For His Life in Detention  
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¶3. In pre-trial detention for a month, Astafyev told Nomokonov that he fears for his life. Astafyev's lawyer Yaroslav Redin filed an appeal with the Kray court to release him from detention on the grounds that the non-violent charges do not require immediate incarceration, which a judge denied. Nomokonov is hoping that increased public attention to the case will help keep Astafyev from being killed while in detention and is pushing local journalists to publish information about Astafyev. One local newspaper ran two long articles about the arrest. He expressed hopes that U.S. journalists will also be interested in this human rights case.

¶4. On July 15 Astafyev passed a note to the U.S. Consulate through his ex-wife, again expressing concern for his life. In the note he wrote that investigators searched his apartment, confiscated all photos from his two trips to the U.S., and impounded the personal computer containing the report which listed facts and names of high-level officials involved in hostile takeovers in the Russian Far East. The note ended with the words "Please, help me!!! I need assistance. I wanted to help Russia fight corruption. I was so naive to write about it in my grant paper and that's why I have such troubles. SOS! Save me, help, please."

## Long a Target of Corrupt Officials

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15. Astafyev's position against corruption made him a target for officials threatened by his work and he has been under official investigation several times, though no charges were ever brought until now. In the mid-1990s his research led to the arrest of future Vladivostok mayor Vladimir Nikolayev, who was then head of the "Winnie Pooh" organized crime group in Vladivostok. Last year he coordinated a fraud and misappropriation investigation against Primorye Governor Sergey Darkin and had an order to arrest the governor, though Darkin managed to have the investigation derailed after a visit to Moscow.

## Murder Warnings Ignored by UVD

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16. After the dissolution of the Anti-Organized Crime Department in 2008, Astafyev was appointed head of the Primorye Kray UVD's Witnesses Protection Center. In late 2008 Astafyev warned Primorye UVD Head Andrey Nikolayev that the business conflict involving the OGAT Transport Company would lead to murder. According to Astafyev, Nikolayev put his report in a safe and refused to investigate. Shortly thereafter the company's director was murdered in an apparent contract killing. Among the names he reported as being involved in the matter were Aleksandr Sarkisov and Andrey Vasilchenko, who work with the Russian Far East branch of the Ministry of Interior, and Anatoliy Tyazhlov, who was the former head of the Khabarovsk FSB, a former advisor to Primorye Governor Sergey Darkin, and founder of an Anti-corruption NGO.

## Several Anti-Corruption Crusaders Beaten

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17. During the months before his arrest, Astafyev began to expect violence against him and always entered his apartment building with his side gun in hand. There have been several

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beating attacks against law enforcement officers investigating hostile takeovers in the past several months, two of which resulted in death while two other victims needed intensive care.

The official cause of death for one of the officers was "accidental fall", though the blow that killed him was located on the top of his skull. According to Nomokonov, Astafyev left home earlier than usual one day and saw a man with truncheon in his hand waiting for someone.

18. Nomokonov described his colleague as a man with a sincere desire to fight corruption and respect for the rule of law, mentioning that Astafyev once refused to shoot Chechen prisoners of war when ordered to. Olga Pak, a former journalist for Zolotoy Rog, has known Astafyev for seven years and stated that Astafyev is naive in his sincere fight against corruption and has many enemies in the UVD. Another contact mentioned that Astafyev wrote his legal dissertation himself instead of purchasing one which is common practice.

19. COMMENT. Astafyev is the second anti-corruption figure to make the news this month, following the five-year prison term handed to former Far Eastern Customs Directorate Chief General Ernest Bakhshetsyan (reftel). Both cases should be included in the annual Human Rights Report and are indicative of the fact that investigating corruption is acceptable to authorities as long as it doesn't point too high up the power hierarchy. Mention of this case in dealing with Russian officials on corruption would be appreciated and we hope that Astafyev finds allies in the Western and Russian press.

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